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U.S./USSR/
TERRORISM

MACNEIL: In Washington, the Reagan administration continued its attacks on the Soviet Union as a source of terrorism in the world. Yesterday, Secretary of State Shultz denounced the Soviets for sponsoring what he called a 'league of terror.' Today, speaking to the same international conference on terrorism, U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick again attacked the Soviet Union.

JEANE\KIRKPATRICK (U.S. ambassador to the U.N.): The Soviet Union, Soviet theorists, began to identify the armed road, they called it, as the way to power in the Western Hemisphere. National liberation movement is the name given to groups supported by the Soviet Union and associated states seeking power by violence. Their acceptance as legitimate by and inside the United Nations is as good an indicator as any of the moral confusion which has come to surround the use of violence, the choice of violence as the method of political action, the preferred method of political action, the instrument of first resort.

MACNEIL: Defense Secretary Weinberger was also talking about terrorism today. He told reporters it might be useful to call upon the United Nations to create an international organization to deal with terrorism. Jim?

LEHRER: The list of journalists who are experts on terrorism is a short one. Some would say it contains only one name, that of Claire Sterling. Ms. Sterling has been a U.S. correspondent in Rome for 30 years. She was the first to report authoritatively of the networks among terrorists and the first to report the alleged Bulgarian connection to the attempted assassination on the pope, among other things. She's written extensively on the subject, including two books, 'The Terror Network,' and 'The Time of Assassins.' She is in Washington attending the Jonathan Groups Terrorism Conference. All right, first, let's take just what's happened at the conference thus far, quickly. Ambassador Kirkpatrick's comments about the Soviet Union. How strong is that tie, provably?

CLAIRE\STERLING (terrorism expert): Well, I think the evidence has been available to the Western governments for a long time. They have been unwilling to concede this publicly until very recently. We now have official government reports in several countries, uh, most specifically, one prepared by the Italian military intelligence service, *Sismi, which was published last year, sent as a report to parliament last year, in which they clearly and unconditionally stated that the Red Brigade had been working in, uh, coordination with other groups out of a, an institution in Paris, and that there was a KGB liaison attached to that institution in Paris, and that the KGB had been, had reached the point, by the end of the 1970s, Soviet secret service, where it could

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manipulate and orient the activities of the Red Brigades. Now, this, this is based, of course, that was a summary report, but it is based on a long accumulation of evidence. Uh, Italy, too, has named, uh, a Soviet agent who was serving as a liaison between right-wing and left-wing terrorists, to provide arms for both in Italy. We have a similar situation in Spain, with a Basque group, *Etat Militar, uh, and I think by now, the evidence accumulated among the various intelligence services is so commanding that it can't be ignored.

LEHRER: And there's no doubt in your mind about it, is there? STERLING: No, there's no doubt. I think we should be clear about this. I don't believe, and I have, I don't believe anybody who studies the subject can, uh, reasonably say that the Russians create these situations. They exploit the situations. That is, these terrorist groups are indigenous groups, almost always, arising, which, which make use of, uh, whatever grievances are presented in the context of the country, social, economic, ethnic, whatever. But once they're there with the capacity to undermine, destabilize, spread confusion, they are then given the wherewithal by the, by the Russians directly, or through surrogates, through the weapons, the training, the sanctuary, the intelligence gathering process, so that they can become increasingly effective, sophisticated, uh, with a greater power to frighten.

LEHRER: Let's go through some of the solutions or suggestions for combating terrorism that came up at this conference. First of all, Secretary of State Shultz says pre-emptive strikes against terrorists are something that should be tried. Do you agree with that? STERLING: I don't know what it means, to tell you the truth, and it makes me nervous. I think that pre-empted (sic), pre-emptive intelligence is absolutely indispensable. That is, it is far more intelligent on our part, and far more effective, to have advanced knowledge of what terrorists are planning rather than go after them after the event. And clearly, that means--it's a dirty word, but it has to be faced--it means that they have to be infiltrated. That's, I think, something that's accepted by anybody that is trying to cope with the problem seriously. If you go on to something like a pre-emptive strike, what does that mean? Do we go into another country and hit a group that we think is... on what basis? How can we be sure? I'm very nervous about the idea, and I'd like to know a lot more before saying it's a good one.

LEHRER: On the infiltration thing, have the, has the U.S. and other Western governments been very successful thus far in infiltrating these terrorists? STERLING: Well, there'd been a period where there was almost practically

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no infiltration, and it was the period when the terrorist groups working in western Europe were their most effective. Uh, the, it, infiltration began in Italy, for example, only in the last two or three years, and it has been extremely effective. It has been one of the great contributing factors to bringing the terrorist problem under control, under restraint, in Italy.

LEHRER: Another suggestion was made by former Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, who has called for a voluntary international organization to specifically go after terrorists. Uh, Secretary of Defense Weinberger said, 'Hey, the United Nations should do that. We don't need anything like that.' What's your view? STERLING: Oh, no, neither. (both laugh)

LEHRER: OK, neither and none of the above, huh?
STERLING: NO, I, there are, there is plenty of institutional framework. Uh, what is lacking is the resolution and will to coordinate intelligence gathering and coordinate antiterrorist strategy. If the will exists and the resolution exists, there's no problem of organization. I don't think anything is solved by adding yet another one, and I don't think it should be done through the U.N., absolutely, either...

LEHRER: OK. STERLING: ...where the lack of will is rather pronounced.

LEHRER: Let's go to one of your major recent stories, and that is, the involvement of, of Bulgarian agents in the attempted assassination of the pope. What is... Is, is the proof there overwhelming, from your perspective?
STERLING: Well, I believe, yes, in, in my opinion, the proof is overwhelming. There is proof, I think, very direct, incriminating proof that the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome was involved in the escape machinery that had been set up for the gunman, Agca, and his accomplice, *Oral Chelig. There is massive evidence that, uh, information given to the judge by Agca, in his confession, starting in 1979, has been corroborated... corroborated in astonishing detail. There is, it is said by the state prosecutor now, it is certain and ascertained, in his words, that the 3 million Deutschmarks which had been promised to Agca for this operation were deposited in a German bank in Frankfurt, uh, and four days after the deposit was made, Agca came back from a holiday at *Palmada, Majorca, picked up his gun in Milan and came down to Rome for the hit. I think that the accum... the accumulated impact of the evidence is very, very strong.

LEHRER: Motive? STERLING: The motive was, was surely the physical elimination of this, of this Polish pope whose tremendous power, uh, hold over the Polish people

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and over the Catholic populations of all the Soviet block and inside the Soviet Union was such that he'd become an alternative pole of authority to the Soviet leadership, and this is something that is just not acceptable in, in the Soviet structure.

LEHRER: No, no question in your mind, the Soviets knew what was goin' on? STERLING: Well, I don't think it's really possible to doubt, if it is established by the evidence, and I believe it to be, judging by the state prosecutor's report in Italy, that the Bulgarian secret service was directly involved and the Bulgarian Embassy was involved. I think the next step, it really is not possible to argue plausibly that this could've been done without the Russians' knowledge.

LEHRER: I hear you. Claire Sterling, thank you very much.